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SUBJECT: CHAVISTAS FEELING BOXED IN BY THE SECRETARY'S
INTERVIEW AND LATEST DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING HONDURAS

REF: CARACAS 851

CARACAS 00000858 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
FOR REASON 1.4(D)

11. (C) Summary: Chavistas may be feeling that the calls for a stronger US response regarding the coup in Honduras may have backfired and diminished the possibility of a Venezuelan-led resolution to the current situation. The announcement by Secretary Clinton that Costa Rican President Oscar Arias would lead the mediation between the Honduran factions removes Chavez from the forefront after the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (GBRV's) concerted effort to dominate the Honduran coup and support Zelaya. The Secretary's interview on embattled Globovision TV July 7, granted immediately after the meeting with Zelaya and the Arias announcement, lent the media outlet tacit support while simultaneously raising sensitive issues in a way that Chavistas will find difficult to criticize. That said, the public and private reactions to these developments indicate some Chavistas will continue to attack the US even if they feel they have been outflanked. End Summary.

SECRETARY'S INTERVIEW AND ARIAS ANNOUNCEMENT DRAW PUBLIC FIRE

12. (C) The Secretary's July 7 interview with opposition-oriented Globovision TV's "Hello, Citizen" -- the fiercely anti-government talk show intended to parallel Chavez's "Hello, President" weekly broadcasts -- was subsequently re-broadcast by state-owned Venezolana TV (VTV). After airing the interview in full, Chavista journalist Eva Gollinger and host Mario Silva gave their opinions, attacking Globovision for "polishing the shoes" of the Secretary. They went on to blame former A/S Shannon for being involved in the Honduran coup, noting that he had "followed the script" of the failed Venezuelan coup attempt in 2002, when he was serving as WHA/DAS. The hosts also suggested that the Secretary's comments indicated that the Venezuelan military should prepare itself because the United States was setting itself up to invade. Gollinger falsely quoted the Secretary as pledging that the United States would take unspecified action if the situation in Venezuela did not improve within a month -- a particularly bizarre assertion given that the interview has just been aired several minutes prior.

13. (SBU) The announcement that Costa Rican President Oscar Arias would serve as a mediator for the conflict in Honduras has received front-page news both in state-owned and opposition-oriented media. The state-run Bolivarian News

Agency has highlighted the popular demonstrations of support for Zelaya in Tegucigalpa, and also carried statements from Arias that the United States has not unduly interfered in the mediation process, which he was quoted as saying must be initiated by the Hondurans rather than an outside element.

THE GBRV COMPLAINS PRIVATELY TO THE EMBASSY

14. (C) Venezuelan businessman and sometimes unofficial GBRV liaison to the Embassy Rene Arreaza called the DCM July 7 to express concern that Secretary Clinton had recorded an interview earlier that day with Globovision. Arreaza said that President Chavez had just learned about the interview and wanted to know what was going on. As a result, Arreaza had received several calls about the interview, including one from Foreign Minister Maduro, asking him to reach out to the Embassy. The DCM noted that the Embassy had learned of the interview shortly before it took place, and the GBRV needed to view the interview in the context of events in Honduras. He noted that Chavez had publicly expressed doubts about the true intentions of the US government in Honduras, accused the US of being behind the coup, and challenged President Obama to clarify his position on Honduras (reftel). The DCM also said that in the course of July 7, President Obama had addressed Honduras in his speech in Moscow, Secretary Clinton met with President Zelaya and held a press conference, and Secretary Clinton also agreed to a long-standing request for an interview by Globovision that allowed her to speak directly to the Venezuelan people on the issue of Honduras and our hopes for an improved dialogue with Venezuela.

15. (C) Arreaza protested to the DCM, saying that the Globovision principals were coup plotters. The DCM conveyed

CARACAS 00000858 002.2 OF 002

to Arreaza the Ambassadors' suggestion that GBRV officials watch the interview, and said that if they had any concerns about the content the Ambassador would be happy to talk to them. The DCM also reminded Arreaza that the point of the Ambassador's return to Venezuela was to open a new dialogue with the GBRV, and expressed disappointment that no senior official had attended the US Independence Day celebration on June 2. He also noted that while the Ambassador had agreed to travel to Ciudad Bolivar this year on short notice to attend the Venezuelan Independence Day ceremonies presided over by President Chavez, there had been no opportunity to interact with him, in contrast to last year's events, when President Chavez had reached out to the Ambassador in the diplomatic gallery to propose greater cooperation and dialogue. Arreaza thanked the DCM for his comments and said that he would relay them to the GBRV officials who had contacted him.

COMMENT

16. (C) Chavez has inserted himself into the Honduran conflict asserting his credentials as a defender of democracy and a leader in the region. The selection of widely respected Oscar Arias as a mediator is a decision Chavez can hardly criticize but is unlikely to welcome. The subsequent interview of the Secretary on Globovision was probably irritating to Chavez but, again, in substance not something to which he could convincingly object. While his militant supporters will probably continue to make fantastical claims about the deeper meaning within the Secretary's comments -- or assert outright fabrications -- Chavez himself will be hard-pressed to attack her or Arias directly without appearing to be out of step with the international community.

This may be why neither Chavez nor any other official GBRV spokesman has yet to comment publicly on the latest events.

End Comment.

DUDDY